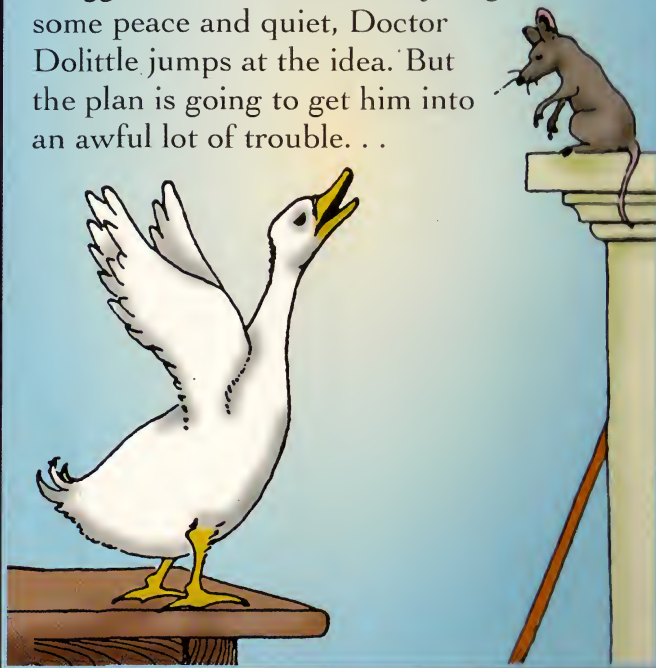


DOCTOR DOLITTLE

IN TROUBLE

There just aren't enough hours in the day for Doctor Dolittle. Not only is he busy talking to and helping his animal friends, he's also trying to write a book about them all. So when his friend Matthew Mugg tells him of a sure way to get some peace and quiet, Doctor Dolittle jumps at the idea. But the plan is going to get him into an awful lot of trouble. . .



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HUGH LOFTING

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From the Stories by
HUGH LOFTING

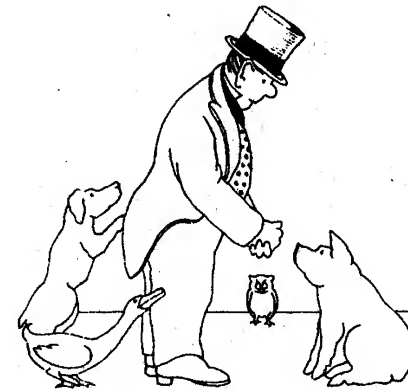
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From the stories by
HUGH LOFTING

Abridged by
CHARLIE SHEPPARD

RED FOX

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1. Peace and Quiet

Let me introduce myself: my name is Tommy Stubbins, I am ten years old and I live in Puddleby-on-the-Marsh. Puddleby is a small town and it's also the home of a very famous animal doctor – Doctor Dolittle. Perhaps you've heard of him. You see, John Dolittle is the only man in the world who can actually talk to animals.

Doctor Dolittle hasn't always been an animal doctor. He started off as a people's doctor, but he realised that he liked animals much more than humans and decided to look after them instead.

Then one day the Doctor made an amazing discovery. His parrot, Polynesia, let him into a secret and taught him some animal languages.

Well after that, Doctor Dolittle practised and practised and it wasn't long before he could talk to nearly all his animal patients in their own languages. This made him very popular with the animals, and soon all of them wanted to be treated by him.

I met the Doctor when he helped a sick squirrel I had found, and we have been friends ever since. Of course, with all the animals wanting to be cured by Doctor Dolittle, it wasn't long before he needed some help. So you can imagine how happy I was when the Doctor decided to make me his assistant. He agreed to teach me how to speak to animals and to read and write if I would help him with the sick creatures that came to his surgery and do some odd jobs around the place. My parents thought that this would be a wonderful opportunity for me as they were too poor to send me to school, and so I went to live with the famous animal doctor.

But I wasn't the only guest in his house. A few of the animals he had helped became very special friends to the Doctor and also came to live with him. Dab-Dab the duck was the Doctor's housekeeper and she did the cooking

and cleaning for us. Too-Too the owl was in charge of the Doctor's money because if he wasn't careful the Doctor would spend it all on being kind to the animals and there wouldn't be a penny left for himself.

Gub-Gub the pig had been with the Doctor ever since he was a piglet. He was certainly the greediest member of the household but everyone loved him very much. Jip the dog and Chee-Chee the monkey were loyal friends to the Doctor, and Whitey the little white mouse would do anything for John Dolittle.

After a while the Doctor thought he would like to write a book on animal languages so that everyone could talk to their pets. I had to agree this sounded like a very good idea but the problem was finding enough time for him to get started. As the weeks went by the Doctor became more and more anxious to write his book.

One evening after all our work for the day was done, we sat in the kitchen talking. Matthew Mugg, the Cats'-meat-man, had called in to see us but it was getting late and we had packed all the animals off to bed because John

Dolittle and I were pretty tired.

The Doctor was filling his pipe from the big tobacco-jar, and when he had got it lighted and going well he said to me, 'You know, Stubbins, I can't see how I'll ever get that book started, as things are going at present.'

'Yes, Doctor,' I said, 'I know what you mean.'

'It isn't that I mind helping the animals here,' he went on. 'It's just that there are only twenty-four hours in the day. And no matter how I try to arrange it, I don't – I simply don't – seem to find any time for writing. You see, I always feel that these animals who call on me with their troubles, must be seen to first. But that means the book always ends up coming second. Maybe nobody will take any notice of it when it comes out, but I do want to get it written. I hope it's going to be a very important work.'

'You ought to go away somewhere, Doctor,' said the Cats'-meat man, 'so you could have peace and quiet. From what Tommy tells me, you ain't likely to get none here.'

'That's an idea,' cried John Dolittle. 'But where would I go?'

'Take a seaside holiday, Doctor,' said Matthew. 'Go down to Margate. Lovely place! I got a cousin down there in the lobster-fishing business. Nobody would bother you in Margate. It's far enough off from Puddleby so not even the animals around here would know where you'd gone.'

The Doctor frowned slightly as he looked into the bowl of his pipe.

'Yes,' he said, 'but you see, Matthew, there's always that problem of money. Where can a man go without money?'

Matthew drummed a moment on the table with his fingers.

'Now, Doctor,' he said at last, 'the main thing you're looking for is peace and quiet, ain't it?'

'That's it,' said John Dolittle. 'A place where I can write my book undisturbed.'

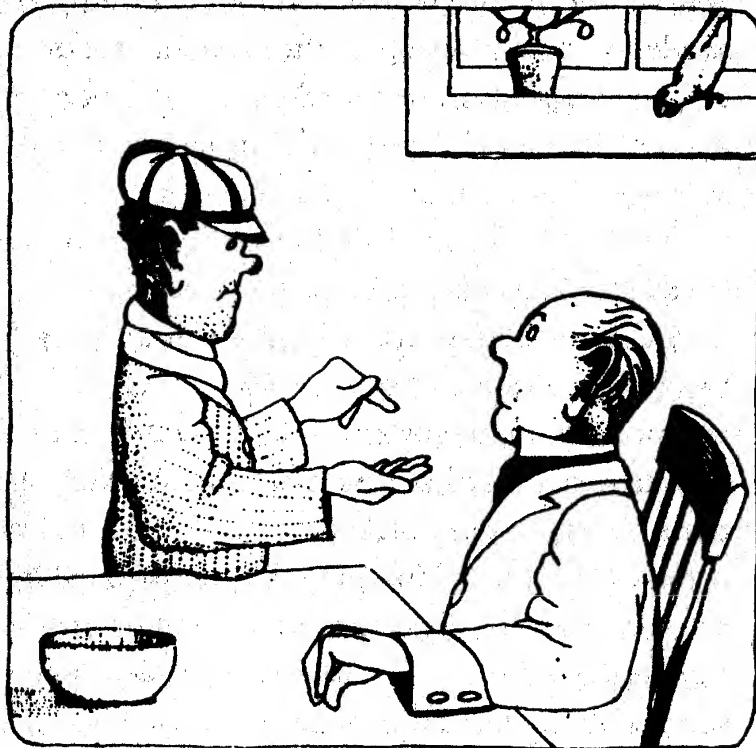
'Well,' said Matthew. 'There's only one place I know where a man can get all the peace and quiet he wants and it won't cost him a penny.'

'Where's that?' asked the Doctor.

'In jail,' said Matthew.

'Oh,' said the Doctor, a little surprised. 'Ah, yes, I see. I hadn't thought of that. But it is an

idea. Quite an idea. But tell me – er – how does one go about getting into jail?’



‘That’s a fine thing for you to be asking me, John Dolittle! My trouble was never how to get into jail; it was always how to stay out of it.’

Both the Doctor and I knew Matthew occasionally got in trouble with the police. His great weakness was poaching, that is, snaring

rabbits and pheasants on other people’s property. Nothing on earth could ever persuade him this was wrong. And whenever he was missing and suddenly turned up again after several weeks, the Doctor never asked him where he had been because he had probably had one of his ‘little run-ins with the police’ as he called them.

‘Now listen,’ said Matthew, leaning forward, ‘let’s talk about this. First thing we’ve got to decide is which jail to get you into, see? There’s lots of difference in them. I wouldn’t recommend Puddleby jail. No – too draughty. I got an awful chill last time I was there. Well, then, there’s Oxenthorpe jail. No – come to think of it – I wouldn’t pick that one either. It’s a nice jail, you understand. But the old Justice of the Peace what sits on the bench up there is a snooty old bloke and he’s liable to give you hard.’

‘Hard?’ said the Doctor. ‘I don’t quite understand.’

‘Hard labour,’ said Matthew. ‘You know, work. You have to work all the time you’re in there – making ropes and that kind of thing. You wouldn’t want that. You want peace and quiet so you can write a book. No, Oxenthorpe

is out. But then there's Gilesborough. Ah, now that's the place you—'

'But excuse me,' the Doctor interrupted, 'won't I have to break the law if I want to get into jail?'

'Oh, that's easy, Doctor,' said the Cats'-meat-man. 'Listen, all you've got to do is go up to a policeman and push him in the face. You'll get into jail all right.'

'Er — er — well, now wait a minute,' said the Doctor. 'I'm not what's called conventional, as you know, Matthew. In fact, I too have been in prison. I was thrown into a dungeon in Africa by the King of the Jolliginki. But I didn't have to do anything for that. The King just didn't like strangers. And I can't say that I blame him — seeing what his experience with them had been. But, to come back: I think that your idea sounds good in many ways. A prison, with high stone walls, should be a splendid place to write.'

'The grub's rotten — that's the only thing,' said Matthew, reaching for the tobacco-jar.

'Well, that won't bother me,' said John Dolittle. 'I'm eating as little as possible now, you know, on account of my weight. But the way to

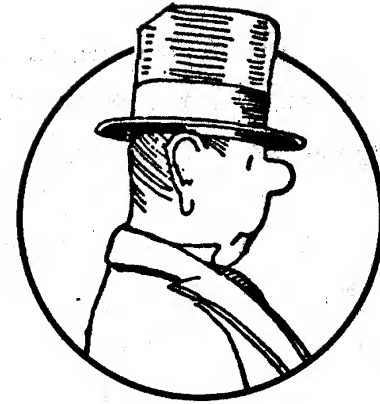
get into jail is the thing that may prove difficult. Listen, Matthew: don't you think I could do something less violent? I mean, instead of pushing a policeman's face, couldn't I just — er — break a window or something?'

'Oh, yes,' said Matthew. 'There's lots of ways of getting into jail. But, you see, just for busting a window you'd only get a sentence of a few days. How long were you thinking you'd want to stay?'

'Er — I just don't know, Matthew,' said the Doctor. 'But certainly until I get most of my book finished.'

'Well,' said the Cats'-meat-man, 'there's no need to worry about that yet. If the judge only gives you fourteen days and you want to stay longer, all you've got to do is tear up your bed or something like that. Or, if they set you free, you can just break another window and come back in again, see? That part's easy. Now I've got to be going. My wife, Theodosia, always gets kind of fussy if I'm out late at night. But you think it over, Doctor. If you want peace and quiet there's no place like a prison cell. But when you start your window-breaking you'd

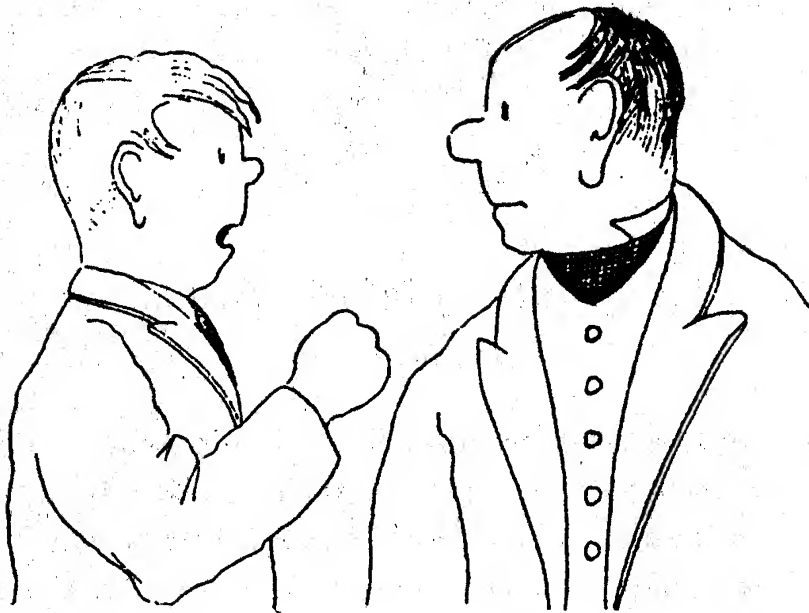
better let me come and help you. No, don't thank me, Doctor, it'll be a pleasure, I assure you! Wouldn't do to have no bunglin'. The job's got to be done right. You might get into trouble! And choose Gilesborough. Trust me. It's a nice jail. Good night!



2. Doctor Dolittle Makes a Decision

After Matthew had left, the Doctor and I sat on chatting for a little longer. It was quite clear, as John Dolittle talked, that he was becoming more and more keen on the idea of jail as the best place to go for finishing his book. The work at his house interested him no end, but there was clearly no possible chance of him writing while he stayed at home. He felt that this book was the most important thing he had ever done. At the same time he hated to leave his patients. He asked me what he should do and I was very flattered that he wanted my opinion.

'Well, Doctor,' I said, 'it seems to me that it is a question of which is the most important, the book or the patients?'



'Quite so, Stubbins,' he said. 'That's just it. And it's hard for me to make up my mind. You see, as I told you, so many of these sick animals have come to rely on me – and me alone – to help them in their troubles.'

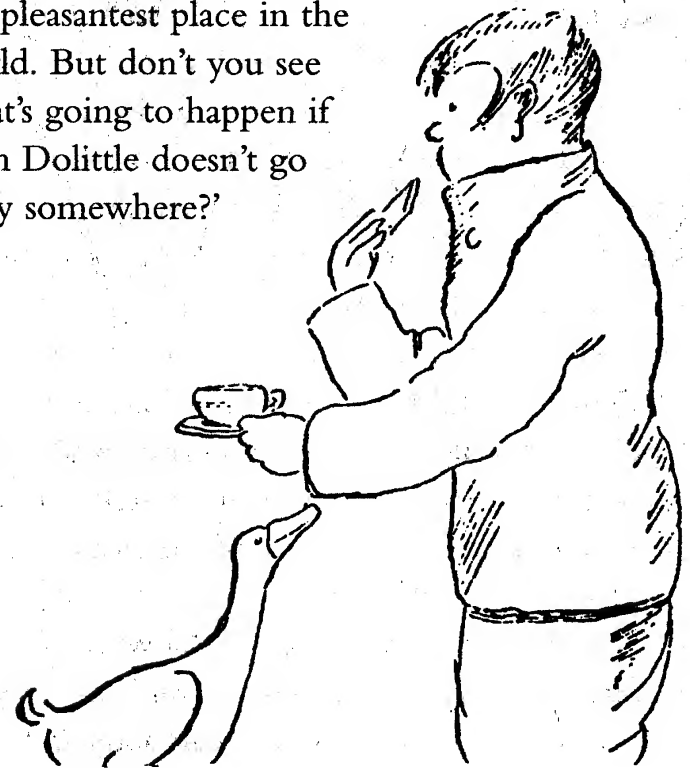
'Yes, but just the same,' I said, 'how did they manage before you came along? I can't see why you feel you must take care of everybody and

everything in the world, Doctor. That's more than anyone could do. It won't take you forever to write your book. Why can't the patients manage without your help for that length of time?'

He shrugged his shoulders but did not answer.

The next day I talked the matter over with Dab-Dab.

'Tommy,' she said, 'that man Matthew Mugg is a scallywag, but he's got brains. Jail may not be the pleasantest place in the world. But don't you see what's going to happen if John Dolittle doesn't go away somewhere?'



'What?' I asked.

'He'll try and do both things,' said Dab-Dab. 'He'll try to look after all these blessed animals – many of them aren't really sick, you know; they just want to get a look at the great man and then go back and brag about it to their friends – and he'll try to write the book. Both at the same time. He'll get ill from overwork. No, the more I think of it, the surer I feel. Matthew's right. The place for John Dolittle is jail. He'll be safe there.'

Well it was towards the end of that week that the Doctor came to a decision. We had a very long line of patients calling on him – worse than usual. The cases were not serious ones, but they kept him on the go from the time he got out of bed till the time he went back to it – long after midnight. When the Doctor came into the kitchen that night he was worn out.

'Stubbins,' he said, as he sank into a chair, 'it's no use my staying here any longer. I've just got to go away.'

'Yes, Doctor,' I said, 'I think you're right.'

'Tomorrow, Stubbins,' he said, 'we'll go over to Gilesborough. You get hold of Matthew for me. I am a little bit afraid of what he may do.'

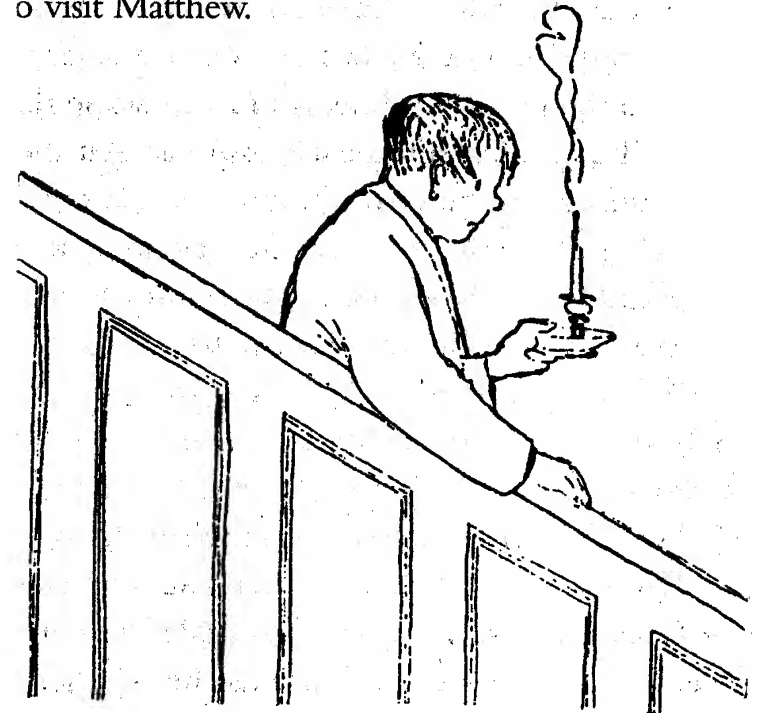
But, on the other hand, I am not as experienced as he is in these matters. So I think it would be a good idea if we had him with us, don't you?'

'Yes,' I said, 'I do.'

'Anyway,' he went on, 'call me early, won't you?'

'All right,' I said. 'Now get some sleep, Doctor. It's quarter to one.'

I was down very early the next morning and, hinking I was up ahead of everybody, I tiptoed hrough the house on my way out o visit Matthew.



But when I entered the kitchen I found the whole family sitting round the table eating breakfast.

'Well, Dab-Dab,' I said, 'he's going!'

'Who's going?' asked Gub-Gub.

'The Doctor,' I said.

'Where is he going?' asked Whitey.

'To jail,' I answered.

'Why is he going?' asked Jip.

'Because he has to,' I said, as patiently as I could.

'When is he going?' asked Too-Too.

'As soon as he can,' I said.

It was the usual bombardment of questions that I got regularly whenever I broke any news about the Doctor.

'Now look here,' said Dab-Dab, addressing the rest of them. 'Stop bothering Tommy with your chatter. The Doctor has decided to go to jail so he can be free.'

'Free – in jail!' cried Whitey.

'Just that,' said Dab-Dab. 'He needs quiet. And you must all understand that where he is going is to be kept a secret. No one is to know where John Dolittle is going. Is that clear to all of you? For a while the Doctor has just got to

disappear from the world – the world of animals as well as of people. All of us must see to it that no one, absolutely no one, gets to hear of where he has gone.'

After a glass of milk I hurried away to see Matthew. The Cats'-meat-man agreed to meet the Doctor and myself in Gilesborough that afternoon.

On my return I got the notes arranged that the Doctor wanted to take with him. He did not plan to take them all with him at once. He felt sure I could bring him more later, as he needed them. And so it was only with a satchel for baggage that we set out together to walk to Gilesborough – a distance of seven miles from Puddleby.



3. *A Bit of a Bungle*

I must confess that I had to smile to myself as we set off. John Dolittle, the great traveller who had undertaken many adventurous voyages was starting off on the strangest journey of all: to jail! And for the first time in his life he was worried that he might not get there.

Gilesborough was quite a place. Its square-towered little church sat up among its surrounding oak trees and could be seen from a long way off. What is more, it was a market-town. Every Friday fine livestock were driven in – Jersey cows, sheep and Berkshire pigs – by the farmers of the neighbourhood. And then once a year, just before Christmas, there was a Goose

Fair. This was visited by people for many miles around and was a very important event.

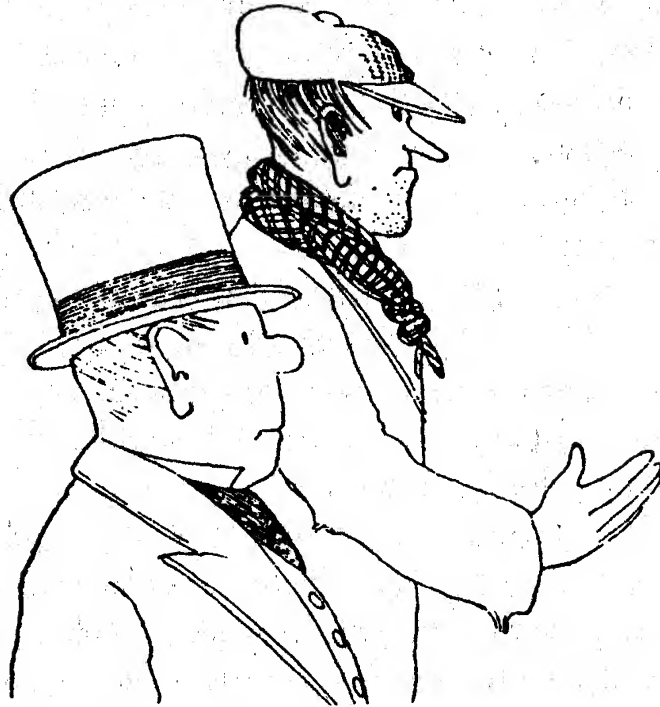
I had visited the town before; and I had enjoyed seeing those jolly farmers with the apple-cheeked wives gathering in the White Hart Inn to talk over the fine points of the sheep shown in the market pens, or neighbours' calves sold at new high prices. All in all, Gilesborough was one of the spots of Old England anyone would love to visit.

The Doctor and I arrived there late on a Friday afternoon. The market was over and the farmers had retired to take their last mug of cider at the taverns before going home. We found the Cats'-meat-man at our meeting-place, waiting for us.

'Now look here, Matthew,' said the Doctor, 'about this window-breaking business: you understand I wouldn't want to break the windows of any poor people – those who couldn't afford it, you know.'

'A good point,' said Matthew, 'a very good point. I take it you'd like better to break the windows of the wealthy. So would I. Well, how about the bank? They've got lots of money and

they'd be sure to prosecute, too, mind you. That's important. They just love to prosecute people. Yes, Doctor, that's the idea. Let's bust the bank's windows. They're made of plate glass – lovely! They'll be closed to customers now, we'll go and take a whack at the bank – excellent! Now, let me see – where are some good stones? Yes – here you are! You take a couple in your pockets and I'll take a few too. Wouldn't never do to have no bunglin'!



Matthew picked up a handful of large pebbles from the road. He handed some to the Doctor and put some more in his own pockets.

'Now,' he said, 'we just go and stroll down the street – casual like. When we get in front of the bank we—'

'Just a minute,' said the Doctor. 'Are you going to throw the stone to break the window, or am I?'

'It just depends, Doctor,' said Matthew, 'on how much of a crowd we find in front of the bank.'

'No, I can't say that I see – quite,' said the Doctor.

'Well,' said the Cats'-meat-man, 'you've got to use judgement in these things – tactics, you know. You might find a whole lot of people in between you and the bank front, and you wouldn't be able to let fly proper, while me – I might see a chance when you wouldn't, see? It won't do to have no bunglin'! You take your cue from me, Doctor. I'll get you into jail all right!'

Matthew went ahead of us a little. The Doctor, with me following behind, was clearly worried.

'I don't quite like this, Stubbins,' he

whispered. 'But I suppose Matthew knows what he's doing.'

'I hope so, Doctor,' I said.

We arrived in front of the bank. It was in a wide square known as the Bargate. Many people were on the pavements. The Doctor was craning his neck here and there, dodging about, trying to see over their heads. Suddenly there was a crash, followed by the noise of falling glass.

'It sounds to me,' said the Doctor, 'as though Matthew has been helping us.'

Before I had time to answer him I heard crie from the people around us: 'Stop him! Stop thief! He tried to break into the bank. Stop him! Catch him!'

'Dear me!' said the Doctor. 'Is it Matthew they're after?'

We saw a scuffle going on ahead of us.

'Yes - yes!' cried the Doctor. 'That's him. Matthew's broken the bank window. Follow me Stubbins.'

We shouldered our way into the crowd that was now gathering thick and fast. In the centre of it, sure enough, we found Matthew struggling in the grasp of a policeman.



'Pardon me,' said the Doctor politely, touching the policeman on the shoulder, 'but it was I who threw the stone that broke the window.'

'I might believe you, sir,' said the policeman, 'if I hadn't seen him with my own eyes. Took a stone out of his pocket – with me right behind him – and threw it through the bank's front window. Besides, I know this troublemaker. He's a poacher over from Puddleby way. A bad lot, he is. Come along with me, young feller. And it's my duty to warn you that anything you say may be held against you in court!'

And poor Matthew was marched away towards the jail.

'But, Constable,' said the Doctor to the policeman, 'you must listen to me. I—'

'Never mind,' whispered Matthew. 'Don't you come to the court, Doctor. You don't want to be known there – not yet. No cause to worry about me. I'll be out of the jail almost before they put me in there. I know all the locks, see . . . Yes, I'm a-coming, old funny-face. Stop pulling – gimme a chance to talk to my friend before I go to the jail, can't you? I'm surprised at you!' (Matthew dropped his voice to a whisper again.) 'I'll be seeing you, Doctor. Just a little mistake, see? If at first you don't succeed, try, try – you know the old saying. Better wait

till I can help you. Wouldn't do to have no bunglin', you know. I'll get you into jail all right, never fear!'



4. *Doctor Dolittle's Arrest*

John Dolittle was all for following our unlucky friend, but I persuaded him not to.

'I think he'll be all right, Doctor,' I said.

'And certainly, as he told you, you don't want to get known at the Court House yet – in case they think there is something funny about us.'

'They'll think that in any case if we go on this way,' said the Doctor gloomily. 'But, Stubbins, I can't bear to feel I have got Matthew into jail. For years I've been trying to persuade him to keep out of it. I almost wish I hadn't started out on this crazy idea.'

'Oh, Doctor,' I said, 'as far as Matthew is concerned, I'm sure you have nothing to worry

about. He's so – well – he's so experienced in these matters.'

'Yes,' said the Doctor thoughtfully, 'that is true. But still if I'm to get into Gilesborough jail I don't think I should wait for his assistance any further. I'd better leave the bank alone, don't you think?'

'Yes, Doctor,' I said. 'I think you should.'

We went on strolling down the main street till presently we came to the outskirts of the town, where there were no shops any more, just private houses.

'This looks like a posh place,' said the Doctor, stopping before a large house with a very elegant front. 'I should think the people here could afford a broken window, what? Well here goes! Now, listen, Stubbins, you'd better keep out of the way. We don't want the wrong man arrested a second time.'

The Doctor drew a stone from his pocket and threw it at a big window on the ground floor. Another crash, and more sounds of falling glass. We waited, watching the front door for someone to come out. No one came. Then a little boy stepped up behind us.

'Mister,' he said, 'there ain't no use in breaking the windows in that house.'

'Why?' asked the Doctor.

'The people's gone away,' said the boy. 'Yes, gone abroad for the winter. I broke all the windows in the back yesterday and no one even chased me off the place!'

'Good gracious!' murmured the Doctor. 'Have I got to spoil every house in this town before I get stopped? Come, Stubbins, let us go on.'

Once more we wandered about, looking for points of attack.

'I don't seem to be doing very well,' said the Doctor dismally. 'I had no idea how difficult it was to get into jail.'

'Well, Doctor,' I said, 'I suppose a lot of it is to do with how you look. Matthew didn't seem to find it difficult to get into jail.'

'Look,' said the Doctor, pointing down the street. 'There's another big house – with lots of carriages driving up to the door. I wonder what's going on there.'

'Most likely they're giving a tea-party, or something of the kind,' I said. 'See, there's a policeman directing the traffic.'

'A policeman!' cried the Doctor. 'Why, so there is! This is splendid, Stubbins. I can't go wrong this time. Important people with plenty of money; a party going on; crowds of witnesses, and a policeman. He's just bound to arrest me. I'll report him for neglect of duty if he doesn't!'

When we came up to the house we saw there was quite a gathering of people watching the guests driving up in their carriages. It certainly seemed to be quite a large and elegant affair which was going on. The Doctor told me to hang back; and he elbowed his way through the crowd till he was near enough to make sure of his aim. By standing on tiptoes, I could see him and his tall hat clearly. Again he took a stone from his pocket and scored a bull's-eye on the largest of the ground-floor windows.

Another crash – and once more the clatter of falling glass. This noise was instantly followed by angry cries from the crowd. Everybody drew away from the Doctor as though they feared he was dangerous. Suddenly, he was left all by himself but looking quite happy and triumphant.

The policeman came through the crowd and looked at him. He was clearly very puzzled by

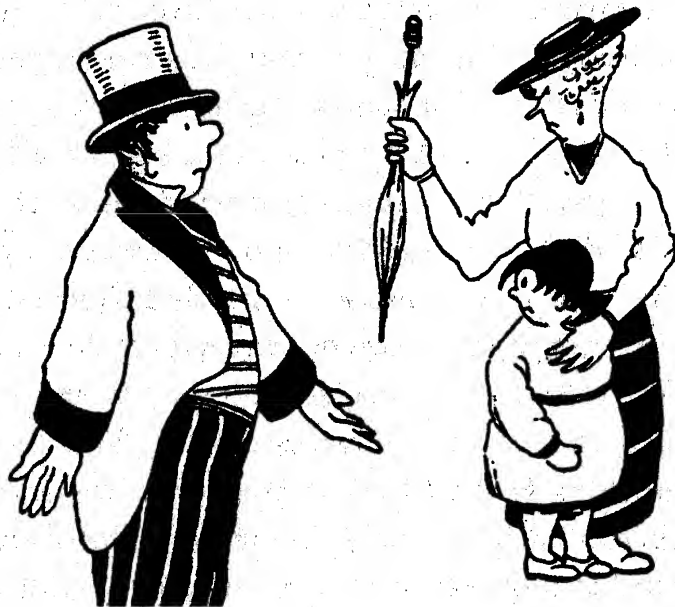
the respectable appearance of the stone-thrower. His eye roamed over the doctor's satchel, his top hat, and his kind face.

'Pardon me, sir,' he said, 'but was it you who threw that stone?'

'Yes,' said the Doctor, 'I threw the stone. My pockets are full of them, look!'

He pulled a handful out of his pocket and showed them.

'Maybe he's crazy,' said a woman near me. 'He's got an awful strange look in his eye. Come back here, Willie!' she said to her young son.



'You keep away from him! He might bite you, or something!'

But the policeman seemed more puzzled than ever.

'Did you throw it on purpose, sir?' he asked in a disbelieving voice.

'Oh, yes, indeed!' said the Doctor brightly. 'Let me show you.'

He took another stone from his pocket and drew back his arm.

'No, no,' said the policeman, hurriedly stopping him. 'You needn't break any more. You can explain yourself to the judge. You must come with me. And it's my duty to warn you that anything you say now may be used in evidence against you.'

'Well, just tell me what to say and I'll say it,' said the Doctor eagerly.

'Yes, he's crazy all right,' murmured the woman near me. 'Come along, Willie. Time to go home.'

'Maybe he was annoyed because he didn't get asked to the party, Ma,' said Willie.

As soon as the Doctor and the policeman had got to the outskirts of the mob, I began

following them, keeping a hundred yards or so behind. This was not difficult because the policeman's helmet could be easily seen at quite a distance.

After a while I decided it was no longer necessary for me to keep back out of the way. The deed was done now and the Doctor need no longer fear that I would be accused of having a hand in it. So when the pair were going through a quiet little alley, I overtook them.

The policeman asked me who I was and what I wanted. I explained that I was a friend of the man he had arrested and I wished to go with them to the police-station. He said that would be all right and the three of us marched on together.

'Stubbins,' said the Doctor, 'can't you think of something I could say which will be used in evidence against me?'

'I don't think there will be any need for that,' I said.

The policeman just raised his eyebrows, looking more mystified than ever. He probably thought he ought to be taking us before a doctor instead of a judge.

Presently we arrived at the Court House and were taken inside. At a tall desk, an elderly man was writing in a book. He looked very severe.

'What's the charge?' he said without looking up.

'Breaking windows, Your Honour,' said the constable.

The judge put down his pen and gazed at the three of us through shaggy grey eyebrows.

'Who, the boy?' he asked, jerking his head towards me.

'No, Your Honour,' said the constable. 'The old gentleman here.'

The judge put on his glasses and peered scowling at John Dolittle.

'Do you plead guilty or not guilty?' he asked.

'Guilty, Your Honour,' said the Doctor firmly.

'I don't understand,' murmured the judge.

'You – at your time of life! Breaking windows! What did you do it for?'

The Doctor was suddenly overcome with embarrassment. He blushed again; shuffled his feet; coughed.

'Come, come!' said the judge. 'You must have had some reason. Do you hold any grudge

against the owner of the house?’

‘Oh, no,’ said the Doctor. ‘None whatever. I didn’t even know whose place it was.’

‘Do you repair windows? – I mean, were you looking for a job?’

‘Oh, no,’ said the Doctor, more uncomfortable than ever.

‘Then why did you do it?’

‘I – er – did it – er – just for a joke, Your Honour!’ said the Doctor, smiling blandly.

His Honour sat up as though someone had stuck a pin in him.

‘For a joke!’ he thundered. ‘And do you think the people of this town consider it a joke to have their houses damaged by you? A joke! Well, if you are trying to be funny at the expense of the Law we will have to teach you a lesson. What is your job – I mean what do you do when you’re not breaking windows?’

At this question poor John Dolittle looked as though he was about to sink into the floor.

‘I am a doctor,’ he said in a very low voice.

‘A doctor! Ah!’ cried the judge. ‘Perhaps you hoped to get some patients – bombarding a house with stones! You ought to be ashamed o

yourself. Well, you have admitted the charge. So far as I know it’s a first offence. But I shall inflict the severest penalty that the Law allows me. You are fined five pounds and costs!’

‘But I haven’t any money,’ said the Doctor, brightening up.

‘Humph!’ snorted His Honour. ‘Can’t you borrow funds? Have you no friends?’

‘No friends with money,’ said the Doctor, glancing at me with a hopeful smile.

‘I see,’ said the judge, taking up his pen. In that case the Law gives me no choice. You have brought it on yourself and you certainly deserve to be taught a lesson. Because you can’t pay your fine you must go to jail for thirty days.’

The Doctor gave a big sigh of relief. He shook me warmly by the hand. ‘Splendid! We’ve done it, Stubbins!’ he whispered as he picked up his satchel.

There was a knocking on the door. Another policeman entered. Behind him was a large flouncy sort of woman wearing many pearls. With her was a coachman, also a footman. The judge got up at once and came down out of his seat to greet her.

'Ah, Lady Matilda Beamish!' he cried.
'Come in. What can we do for you?'



'Oh, good heavens!' I heard the Doctor groan behind me.

'I do hope, Your Honour,' said the lady, 'that I'm not too late. I came as fast as I could. It was

in my house that the window was broken. Is the trial over? I thought you would need me as a witness.'

'The case has been already dealt with,' said the judge. 'The accused pleaded guilty – so there was no need of witnesses beyond the policeman who made the arrest.'

'Oh, I was so upset!' said the woman, fluttering a lace handkerchief before her face. 'We were holding the monthly meeting of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. Refreshments had been served and we were just about to start the meeting when a large stone came flying through the drawing-room window and dropped right into the punch bowl. Oh, it was terrible! Sir Willoughby Wiffle was splashed all over! And myself, I positively fainted away.'

She sank down into a seat and the coachman and footman stood about her, fanning her. The judge sent one of the policemen to get a glass of water.

'Dear Lady Matilda,' he said, 'I cannot tell you how sorry I am this outrage should have happened at your home. However, the prisoner

couldn't pay his fine and he is being sent to jail. It will teach him a lesson. I just have to book some details. I will be with you in a moment.'

Up to this point the woman had been so busy, gasping and fluttering and talking, she had not even looked at the Doctor or myself. Now when the judge left her to go back to his desk, she saw us for the first time. The Doctor turned quickly away from her gaze. But she sprang up and cried out, 'Your Honour, is that the man who broke my window?'

'Yes,' said the judge, 'that's him. Why? Do you know him?'

'Know him!' cried Lady Matilda Beamish, bursting into smiles and gurgles of joy. 'Why, I dote on him! My dear Doctor Dolittle, I am delighted to see you again! But tell me, why didn't you come into the meeting, instead of throwing a stone in instead?'

'I didn't know it was your house,' said the Doctor sheepishly.

The woman turned gushingly to the judge.

'Oh, Your Honour,' she cried, 'this is the most wonderful man in the world. A doctor – that is, he was a doctor, but he turned to

animals instead. Well, five years ago, Topsy, my prize French poodle, had puppies. The sweetest little things you ever saw – but, oh, so ill! I sent for all the vets in the country. It was no use. Topsy and her children got worse and worse. I wept over them for nights on end. Then I heard about Doctor Dolittle and sent for him. He cured them completely, the whole family. All the puppies won prizes in the show. Oh, I'm so happy to see you again, Doctor! Tell me, where are you living now?'

'In jail,' said John Dolittle, 'or, that is, I expect to be, for a while.'

'In jail!' cried the lady. 'Oh, the window – of course. I had forgotten about that. But let me see,' she turned to the judge again, 'wasn't there something said about a fine?'

'Yes,' said His Honour. 'Five pounds. The prisoner was unable to pay it. He was sentenced to thirty days in jail instead.'

'Oh, good gracious!' cried the lady. 'We can't have that. I'll pay the fine for him. Atkins, go and bring me my purse. I left it in the carriage.'

The footman bowed and went out.

The Doctor came forward quickly.

'It's awfully good of you, Lady Matilda,' he began, 'but I—'

'Now, Doctor,' she said, shaking a fat finger at him, 'don't thank me. We can't possibly let you go to jail. It will be a pleasure for me to pay it. In fact, I'm not sure I wouldn't have considered it a privilege to have my window broken, if I had only known it was you who had done it. A very great man,' she whispered aside to the judge, 'a little odd but a very great man. I'm so glad I got here in time.'

The purse was brought by the footman and the money was counted out. The Doctor made several more attempts to interfere but he stood no chance of getting himself heard against the voice of the grateful, talkative lady who was determined to rescue him from jail.

'Very well,' said the judge finally, 'the fine is paid and the prisoner is released from custody — with a caution. This was a particularly nasty breach of the law and it is to be hoped that the prisoner will take the lesson to heart. The court wishes to express the opinion that the lady against whose window the crime was committed has acted in a more than generous

manner by paying the fine.'

The policeman beckoned to the Doctor and me. He led us down a passage, opened a door, and showed us out — into the street.



5. Third Time Lucky

It was almost twilight now and both the Doctor and I were hungry. Feeling that nothing more could be done that day we set off to tramp the seven miles back to Puddleby and supper. For quite a while neither of us spoke.

At last, when we were nearly home, the Doctor said, 'You know, Stubbins, I almost wish I had followed Matthew's advice and pushed a policeman in the face. It would have been so much – er – so much safer. Did you hear what that woman said – almost a privilege to have a window broken by me? Good heavens! And you know, it was the simplest case, her Topsy and the pups. All I did was give them some digestiv

pills – an invention of my own – and get their precious mistress to stop fussing over them and leave them in peace. Topsy told me that Lady Matilda was just driving them crazy, buzzing round them like a bee and giving them the stupidest things to eat. I forbade her to go near the dogs for a week and they got all right – on milk. Ah, well!'

There was great excitement when we reached the house and stepped in at the kitchen door.

'Why, Doctor!' squeaked Whitey, 'didn't you go to jail, then?'

'No,' said the Doctor, sinking miserably in to a chair, 'but Matthew did. I feel terrible about it. I must go over and see his wife Theodosia in the morning. I don't suppose she'll ever be able to forgive me.'

'Matthew! In jail!' said Too-Too. 'Why, I saw him in the scullery just now, washing his hands.'

'You must be mistaken,' said the Doctor. 'The last we saw of him was in Gilesborough. He was being marched off to prison. He threw a stone into the window of the bank, hoping that the people would think it was me. But they didn't. He was arrested.'

At that moment the door into the pantry was opened and Matthew entered smiling.

'Hello, Doctor,' he said cheerily. 'So they wouldn't take you in up at Gilesborough jail, eh? Too bad! Most inhospitable of them, I call it – most inhospitable!'

'But, look here, Matthew,' said the Doctor, 'what about yourself? Do you mean to say they turned you away too?'

'Oh, no!' grinned the Cats'-meat-man. 'They never turn me away – not from jails. But see, on the way to the police-station I happened to remember that I hadn't got my skeleton key with me. And though I could, most likely, have got myself out of that jail without it, I thought maybe it would be best to be on the safe side and escape before I got to jail. So I sized up the copper who was taking me along, see? And I noticed he was a kind of heavy-built bloke, no good for running at all. So with great foresight and hindsight – still going along peacefully with him like – I picked out a spot to shake him. You know that fountain on the green with the big marble pool around it?'

'Yes,' said the Doctor, 'I remember it.'

'Well, just as we came alongside of that pool I said to him, I said, "Why, sergeant," I said, "look, your bootlace is untied." He bent down to look – and, being very fat, he had to bend away down to see his feet. Then I gave him a gentle shove from the rear and in he went, head-first, into the marble pool. Ha! Just as neat as a diving walrus. Then I dashed off across the green and down an alley. I took to the open country as soon as I got a chance. And, well – here I am!'

'Humph!' said the Doctor. 'Good gracious me! Anyway, I'm glad you're safe and sound, Matthew. I was very worried about you. What have we got for supper, Dab-Dab?'

'Fried eggs, cheese, tomatoes and cocoa,' said the housekeeper.

'A-a-a-h!' said Gub-Gub, coming up to the table. 'Tomatoes!'

'Um-m-m-m, cocoa!' said Chee-Chee. 'Good idea!'

'And cheese, hooray!' squeaked Whitey, scrambling down from the mantelpiece.

'You know, Matthew,' said the Doctor when we were seated at the meal, 'I think we had better leave Gilesborough alone. What with you

giving a policeman in uniform a bath, and my fine being paid by the most important lady in the town, I feel we'd better stay away from there. In fact, I'm very discouraged about the whole business. As I told Stubbins, I had no idea it was so hard to get into jail.'

'Well, you see, Doctor,' said Matthew, buttering large slabs of bread, 'that's the way it is: when you want to get into jail they won't have you, and when you don't want to get into jail, they take you and put you there. But don't you be down-hearted, Doctor. Keep up the good work! After all, you did get arrested this last shot, and you didn't even get that far the first time. You see, you've got the beginning of a reputation now. It's easy to get into jail when you've got the right reputation.'

Polynesia, sitting on the window-sill, let out a short 'Huh!'

'Yes, but just the same,' said the Doctor, 'I don't think we should use Gilesborough any more for our – er – experiments.'

'That's all right, Doctor,' said Matthew, reaching for the cheese. 'There's lots of other places. Your reputation will spread. Wonderful



how a good jail reputation gets around. Now listen: there's Goresby-St Clements, pretty little town – and a good jail, too! And I was thinking – should have thought of it before – the best

thing for you to do is not to bother with banks and charity meetings this time. Just go and bust the window of the police-station itself. They'll be bound to lock you up then!

'Humph!' said the Doctor. 'Er – yes, that sounds like a good idea.'

'I'll come along with you, Doctor,' said Matthew. 'You might not be able to—'

'No, Matthew,' said the Doctor firmly. 'I am afraid you may get arrested again by mistake. In fact, I don't believe I'll even take Stubbins with me this time. I'll go alone. It will be safer.'

'All right, Doctor,' said Matthew, 'whatever makes you most comfortable. But you will see there ain't no bunglin', won't you? And don't forget, choose the police-station. Use a good big stone, too. My, but I'd love to see it! When will we be hearing from you?'

'You won't be hearing from me – if I get into jail,' said the Doctor. 'But you will if I don't.'

The next morning John Dolittle set out for Goresby-St Clements. This was another long walk from Puddleby and for that reason he made an early start. Dab-Dab had given him a large packet of sandwiches and a bottle of milk. He

also took with him a good supply of writing paper and lots of pencils – and of course his notes.

I went down the road a little way with him to see him off. He seemed very happy and hopeful as he waved me goodbye. The last thing he said was, 'Stubbins, if I'm not back here by midnight you'll know I've succeeded. Don't bother about visiting me for a good while. And on no account let Matthew come at all. I'll be all right. Look after the animals for me. So long!'

Well that time he did succeed – as we heard later. All the animals insisted on sitting up with me that night to see if John Dolittle would return. When the old clock in the hall struck midnight we knew that he was in jail at last. Then I sent them off to bed.



6. *Worried Friends*

For the next few days I was kept very busy. Without the Doctor in the house I felt entirely responsible that everything should go well.

For one thing, I had to look after the animal patients. Although fewer animals called at the house as soon as it was known that the Doctor was away from home, the sick animals did not by any means stop coming. They all wanted to know where the Doctor had gone. I refused to tell them. Then some of them asked me to give them more of this medicine, or that ointment, which they had been getting before from the Doctor. Next thing, a few who had cuts and

bruises asked if I would treat their troubles, as the Doctor was no longer there. Of course in my years of helping John Dolittle in this sort of work I had learned a lot. I bandaged them up and even set a broken bone or two.

I got very interested in the work. I felt proud that I could handle sick cases all by myself. Then I began to notice that the line waiting outside the surgery door wasn't getting smaller each morning, as it had at the start. Once in a while a more difficult case would come in, needing pretty complicated surgery. I wished the Doctor was there to help me. But he wasn't. Some of these were urgent cases that needed attention at once. There was no one else to handle the work, so I did it.

I began to study John Dolittle's books, volumes he had written on animal medicine. I took on more and more difficult tricks of doctoring – sometimes with my heart in my mouth, scared to death the poor creatures might die under my hands. But none of them did – thank goodness!

Without doubt I was very lucky in this. But also it must not be forgotten that I was greatly

helped by knowing animal languages – I was the only one besides the great man himself who did. I noticed that more and more the animal patients seemed to trust me. Even when I had to put a stitch in a bad cut they lay wonderfully still, knowing that I would save them all the pain I possibly could.

I began to ask myself where all this might lead me to. My reputation among the animals was growing – the same as the Doctor's had done when he first stopped treating humans to take care of the animal world. I don't mean to say that I dreamed for one moment that I could take the great man's place. No one living could ever have done that. But as I got busier and busier with the work of the surgery I did begin to wonder – if the Doctor should stay long enough in prison – whether I might have to run away and hide to get peace and quiet too. Anyhow you can imagine how exciting it was for me to be carrying on the work of such an important person.

But in spite of all there was to do, the old place was not the same without John Dolittle. I missed him terribly – so did the animals. The

chats around the kitchen fire after supper were not the same. Somebody would start a story and we would all begin by listening carefully. But sooner or later the interest would wear off, the thoughts of the listeners would stray and we would end up talking about the Doctor and wondering how he was getting on.

Dab-Dab, Too-Too, Jip and Chee-Chee – although they missed him as much as anyone – did not seem to worry about him so much. They were old and experienced friends of John Dolittle. They felt that he could take care of himself and would send us news of how he was getting on as soon as he wanted to.

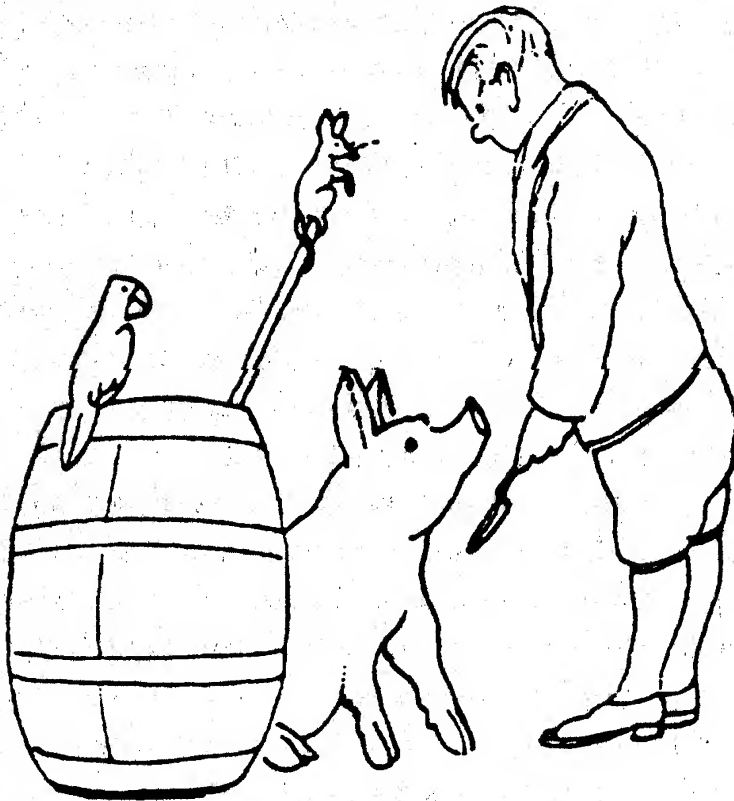
But Gub-Gub and Whitey began to get very upset as day after day went by and no news came from Goresby-St Clements. They took me aside one morning when I was with Polynesia. They both looked very serious.

'Tell me, Tommy,' said Gub-Gub, 'when are you planning to visit the Doctor?'

'Oh,' I said, 'I hadn't set any exact date. But he especially asked me to leave him alone for a while. He's afraid that the police may find out that he got in jail on purpose. He wants to get

settled down before he has any visitors.'

'Settled down!' cried the white mouse. 'That sounds as though he might be there a terribly long time.'



'We don't even know,' said Gub-Gub with a very worried look, 'how long they sent him to prison for. Maybe they sent him to jail for life!'

'Oh, no, Gub-Gub,' I said, laughing. 'They don't send people to prison for life – except for terribly serious crimes.'

'But we haven't heard,' squeaked Whitey. 'Maybe he did do something serious. He wasn't very successful with the window-breaking business. Perhaps he got desperate and killed a policeman – just by accident I mean. Who knows?'

'No, no,' I said, 'that's not at all likely. If he got a sentence of a month in jail, that would be the most. And he would consider himself lucky to get that.'

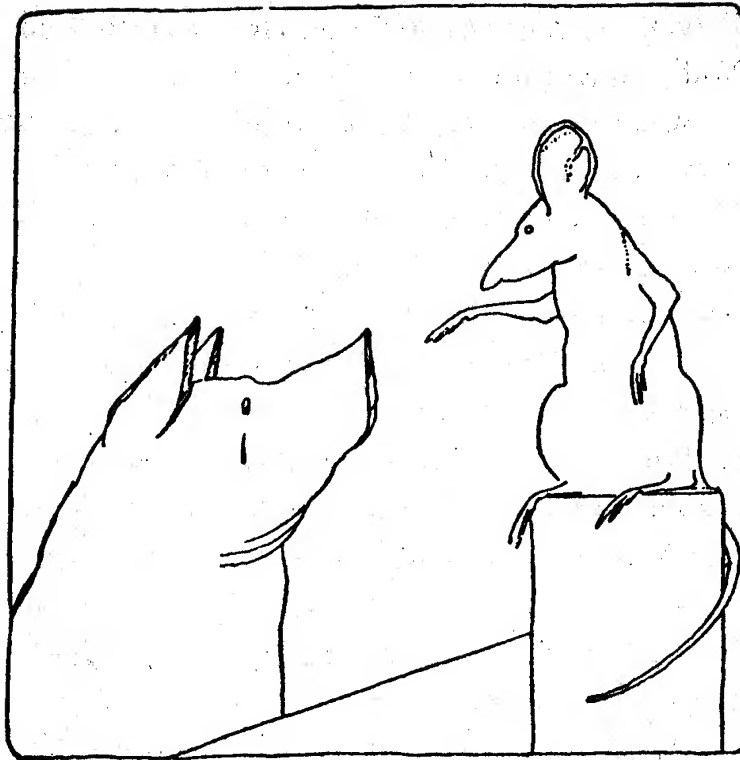
'But we don't know, Tommy, do we?' said Whitey. 'We've heard nothing since he left. I can hardly sleep worrying about it, and usually I'm a very good sleeper. But I do wish we had some word of how he is.'

'What is he getting to eat?' asked Gub-Gub.

'I've no idea,' I said, 'but enough, anyhow, I'm sure.'

'When we were thrown into jail by the King of the Jolliginki in Africa,' said Gub-Gub, 'we weren't given anything to eat at all!'

'Fiddlesticks!' snorted Polynesia, who was



sitting on a tree near by. 'We got put in prison after lunch and we escaped again before suppertime. What do you expect in jail – four meals a day?'

'Well we didn't get anything to eat while we were in prison,' said Whitey. 'Gub-Gub's right. I was there too and I know. Something should be done about the Doctor. I'm worried.'

'Oh, mind your own business!' said

Polynesia. 'The Doctor will take care of himself. You're a fusspot.'

As a matter of fact I was beginning to be a little disturbed about the Doctor myself. Although he had told me he would 'be all right' I was anxious to hear how he was getting on. But that same afternoon Cheapside, the London sparrow, came to pay a visit. He was, of course, very interested to hear what had happened to his friend. When I told him that the Doctor had gone to jail to write a book he chuckled with delight.

'Well, if it ain't like him!' he said. 'Jail!'

'Listen, Cheapside,' I said, 'if you're not too busy perhaps you'd fly over to Goresby and see what you can find out.'

'You bet,' said Cheapside. 'I'll go over right away.'

The sparrow disappeared without another word. He was back again about teatime, and I was very glad to see him. I took him into the study where we could talk privately. He had seen the Doctor, he told me – got through the bars of his prison window and had a long chat with him.

'How did he look, Cheapside?' I asked eagerly.

'Oh, pretty good,' said the sparrow, 'you know John Dolittle – he always keeps up. But he said he'd like to see you, Tommy. He wants some more of his notes. And he's used up all the pencils he took with him. "Tell, Stubbins," he said, "there ain't no special hurry but I would like to see him. Ask him to come over about the end of the week – say Sunday."'

'How is he otherwise?' I asked. 'Is he getting enough to eat and all that?'

'Well,' said Cheapside, 'I can't say as how his board and lodging is any too elegant. He had a kind of mattress to sleep on but it looked to me more like an ironing board. Grub? Well, there again, of course he didn't complain. He wouldn't. You know John Dolittle – the really important things of life never did seem to interest him. He'd eat what was given him and ask no questions. You know how he is!'

At this moment I heard a scuttling among the book shelves.

'What was that noise, Cheapside?' I asked.

'Sounded to me like a mouse,' he said.



7. In the Doctor's Cell

I started out early on Sunday morning for Goresby. Jip walked part of the way to keep me company. I reached the jail about eleven o'clock.



I noticed as I entered the building that many workmen were digging at the side of one wall, as if they were at work on the foundations.

Inside, a policeman booked my name at the desk and made out a visitor's pass for me. As he gave it to me he said, 'Young man, I think you're maybe just in time.'

'Pardon me,' I said, 'just in time? I don't quite understand.'

'The superintendent,' he said. 'He's awful mad. He wants to have Prisoner Dolittle removed.'

I was about to ask him why the superintendent wished to get rid of the Doctor. But at that moment another policeman led me away to my friend's cell.

It was a strange room. The high walls were made of stone. There was a window near the ceiling. Seated on the bed, which was littered with paper, John Dolittle was writing fast and furiously. He was so taken up with his work that he did not seem to notice our coming in. The policeman went out again right away and, locking the door behind him, left us together.

Still the Doctor did not look up. It was only when I started to make my way across to where

he sat that I noticed the state of the floor. It was paved with cobblestones – or rather, I should say, it had been. Now it looked like a street which had been taken up by workmen. The whole floor was broken into big holes and all the cobblestones lay around higgledy-piggledy. Littered among these were scraps of food, pieces of cheese, hunks of bread, radishes – even chop-bones, looking the worse for wear.

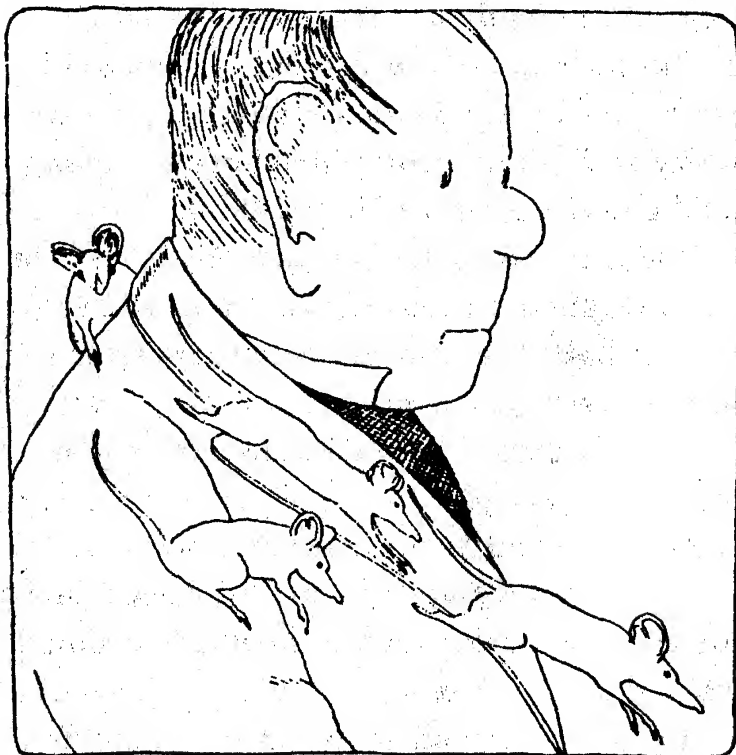
'Why, Doctor,' I asked, touching him gently on the shoulder, 'what's happened here?'

'Oh, hello, Stubbins,' he said. 'Well, I hardly know – er – that is, not exactly. You see I've been so busy. But it seems that I'm going to have to leave very soon.'

'Why, Doctor?' I asked. 'Why? What has happened?'

'Well,' he said, 'everything went fine until three days ago. I had done my best. I broke all the windows in the front of the police-station. I was arrested at once. They gave me a sentence of thirty days in jail, and I thought everything was all right. I set to work on the book and I got a lot done. Everything was going splendidly. And then Wednesday, I believe it was Wednesday – a

mouse came in and visited me. Yes, I know you'd think it was impossible, with all these stone walls. But he got in somehow. Then more came, rats too. They seemed to burrow under the corners, everywhere. They brought me food. They said they had come to set me free.'



'But how did they know you were here?' I cried. 'It has been kept a dead secret.'

'I've no idea,' he said. 'I asked them, but they

wouldn't tell me. Then after the mice had fetched up a lot of rats, the rats went off and fetched a whole lot of badgers. They brought me food, too – all sorts of stuff. Apparently they did not think I was getting enough to eat. The badgers began digging a tunnel under the prison wall to let me out by. I begged them to leave the place alone, but they wouldn't listen. Their minds were made up that it wasn't good for me to stay in jail. And there you are . . . Sit down, Stubbins, sit down!'

I moved some of the papers aside on the bed and made room for myself.

'When the police discovered what a mess had been made,' he went on, 'they moved me into another cell, this one here. But the same thing happened again. The rats and badgers came tunnelling in at night under the walls.'

'But, Doctor,' I said, 'outside, as I came in, they told something about the superintendent. What did they mean?'

'I'm afraid,' he said, 'that I'm going to get out of the prison altogether. After all my work in getting in here! And my book isn't one-quarter done yet!'

As the Doctor finished speaking we heard the rattling of a key in the lock. Two policemen entered. One of them I guessed was the superintendent. He held a paper in his hand.

'John Dolittle,' he said, 'I have here an order for your release.'

'But, Superintendent,' said the Doctor, 'I was sentenced to thirty days. I've hardly been here half that time.'

'I can't help it,' said the superintendent. 'The whole building is falling down. A new crack has just shown up in the guard room wall – all the way from the floor to the ceiling. We've called the architect in and he says the whole jail is going to be wrecked if something isn't done. So we've got a special order from the court withdrawing the charge against you.'

'But look here,' said the Doctor, 'you must admit I was a very well-behaved prisoner. All this disturbance was not my fault.'

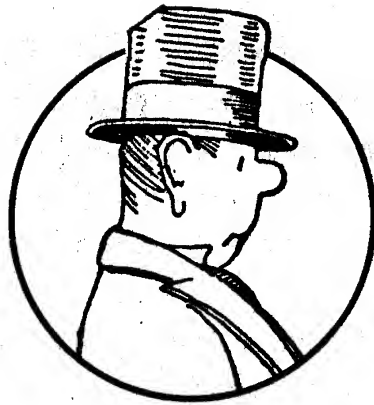
'I don't know anything about that,' said the superintendent. 'Whether these were your own trained circus animals that did this is not the point. I've been in charge here for seven years now and nothing like this has ever happened

before. We've got to save the jail. The charge is withdrawn and out you've got to go.'

'Dear, dear!' sighed the Doctor, 'and just when I was getting so comfortably settled and everything. I don't know what I'll do now, really I don't.'

He looked again at the superintendent as if he hoped he might change his mind. But all that gentleman said was, 'Get your things packed up now. We've got to let the workmen in here to relay this floor.'

Miserably the Doctor put his papers together and I helped him pack them into the satchel. When we were ready the policemen showed us to the door and freedom.



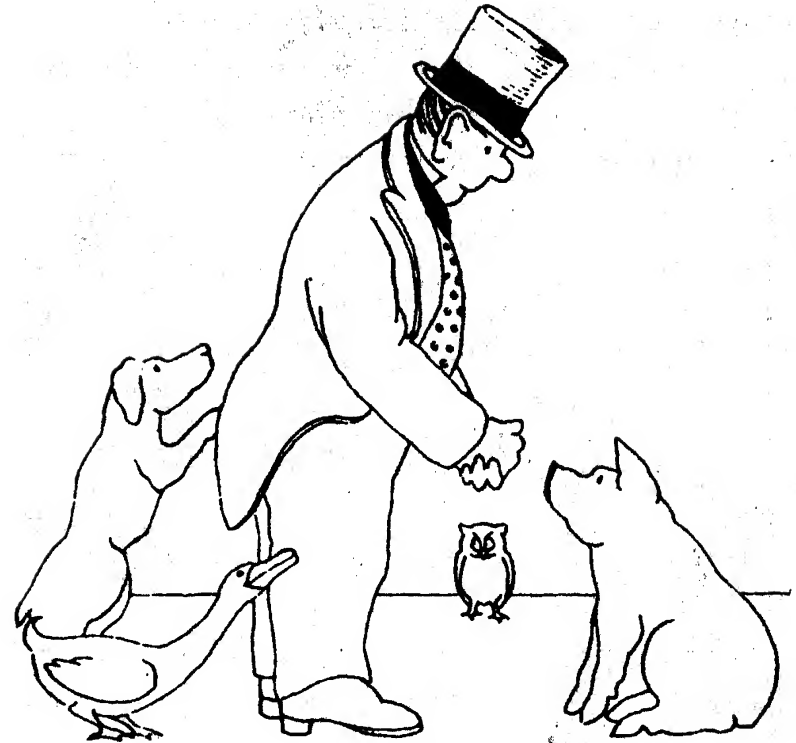
8. *The Little Villain*

We got back home about three in the afternoon.

Once again the whole household wanted to know what had happened – all of them, that is, except Whitey. I noticed that he was not in the garden to meet us with the others. When the Doctor was inside the house he explained why he had come back so soon.

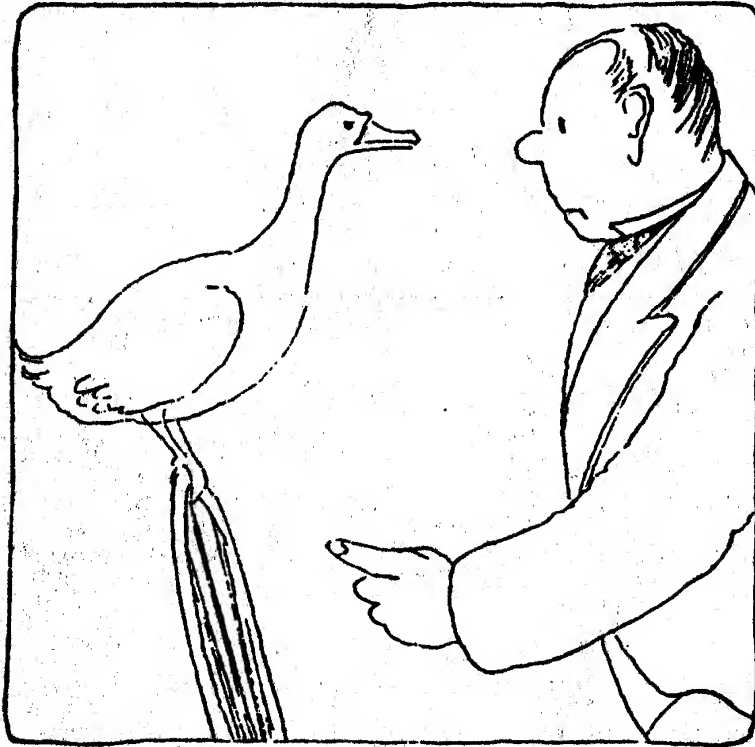
‘Did you say your first visitor was a mouse, Doctor?’ asked Dab-Dab suspiciously.

‘Yes,’ said the Doctor. ‘First one and then hundreds – then rats and then badgers. They turned the whole jail upside down. It will cost the police hundreds of pounds to put the



building right again. I really can’t blame them for wanting to get rid of me. But just the same it was very annoying – just when I was getting into a nice swing with my book and everything was going splendidly. You see, I had planned to break another window, after they turned me loose at the end of my thirty days, and come in again for a new sentence. But there wouldn’t

have been much use in trying to do any more harm to that police-station. The mice and rats and badgers had positively wrecked the place already.'

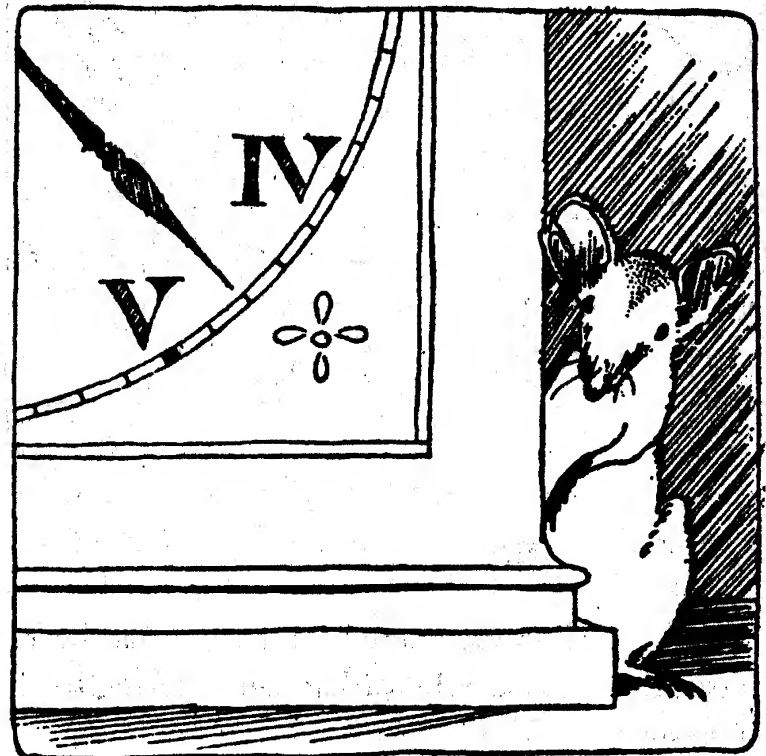


'Humph! Mice, eh?' said Dab-Dab. 'I smell a mouse myself now – a white mouse. Where's Whitey?'

I suddenly remembered the noise I had heard behind the books when I had been talking to Cheapside.

'Yes,' I said, 'where is Whitey?'

A general search for him was made at once. Too-Too discovered him hiding behind the clock on the mantelpiece. He was brought out looking very ashamed of himself and quite scared. Dab-Dab seemed to be the one he was most afraid of. He stayed up on the mantelpiece out of her reach. Dab-Dab positively bristled with anger as she came forward to talk to him.



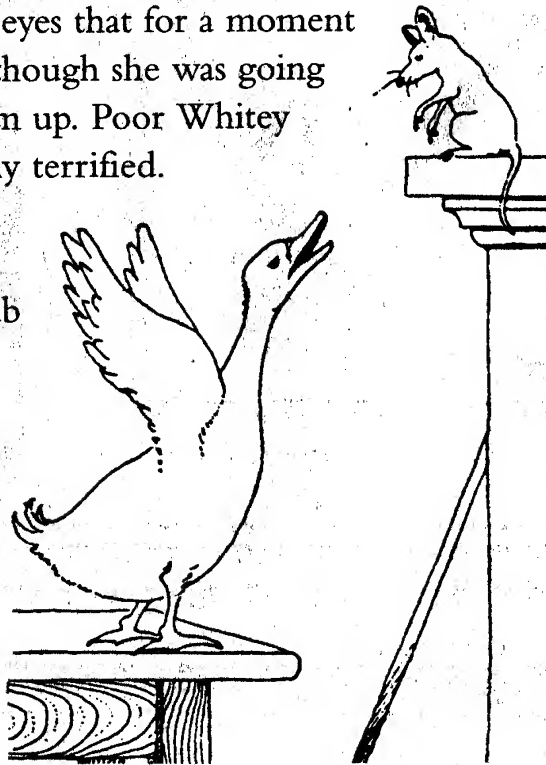
'Now,' she said, 'tell us: did you have anything to do with this?'

'With what?' asked Whitey, trying very hard to look innocent but making a poor job of it.

'With all these mice and rats and badgers going to the prison to set the Doctor free?' snapped the duck. 'Come on now – out with it. What do you know?'

The housekeeper stretched up her neck towards the small culprit with such blazing anger in her eyes that for a moment it looked as though she was going to gobble him up. Poor Whitey was absolutely terrified.

'Well,' he gasped, 'you see, Gub-Gub and I—'



'Oh, so Gub-Gub was in on it too, was he?' said Dab-Dab. 'Where's that pig?'

But Gub-Gub had apparently thought it wiser to go off gardening. At any rate he could not be found in the house.

'Go on then, go on,' said Dab-Dab. 'What did you and that precious Gub-Gub do?'

'We didn't really do anything,' said Whitey. 'But – er – well, you see – er – we couldn't find out how the Doctor was getting on over at Goresby-St Clements. No one could tell us even whether he was getting enough to eat or not. We knew that the food in prisons isn't usually very good. So we – er – well, I—'

'Yes, go on!' Dab-Dab hissed.

'I thought it would be a good idea to talk it over with some local mice and rats,' said Whitey.

Dab-Dab looked as though she was going to have a fit.

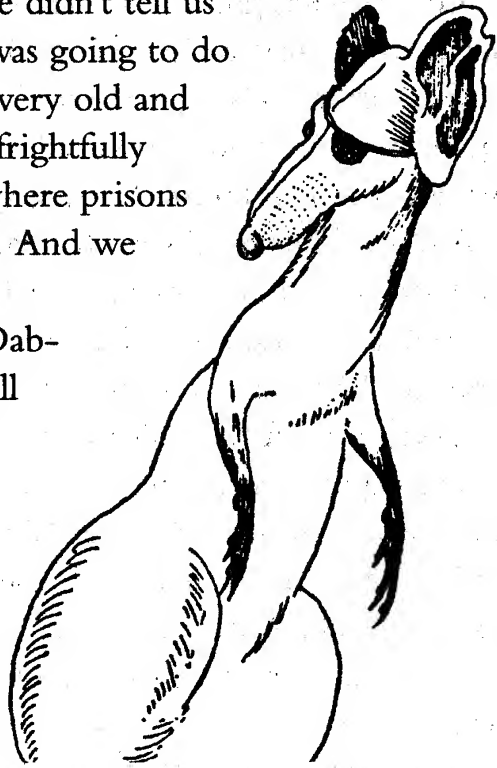
'So!' she snorted. 'You knew perfectly well it was to be kept a secret – where the Doctor had gone and everything – and yet you went down and gabbled your silly little head off to all your friends!'

'But don't you see,' wailed Whitey, real tears

coming into his pink eyes, 'don't you see we didn't know what had happened to him? For all we knew he might have been put in jail for life. When we had talked it over with the old Prison Rat, he said, "John Dolittle should be set free right away." He didn't tell us then how he was going to do it. But he is a very old and cunning rat – frightfully experienced where prisons are concerned. And we trusted him.'

'Oh,' said Dab-Dab. 'Well, will you be good enough to tell us what happened next?'

Then Whitey explained how the old Prison Rat (who in his day had set free an innocent man from jail by carrying a file in to him, so that he could cut his window-bars)



had taken charge of the situation and acted as commander-in-chief in this plot to set the Doctor free.

Rats and mice are curious folk. They live in the houses and homes of people although they are not wanted there – and they know it. But they listen behind the panelling or under the floors and they hear everything and know what is going on. They know everything, because they are always listening.

And so the Prison Rat, that old grey-haired veteran of many adventures, had organised the whole thing. As soon as Whitey had spoken about his fears, this general had laid his plans without asking further questions. All the underground machinery of the world of rats and mice was set in motion. Word was sent out that the beloved John Dolittle, the man who had cured the sicknesses of all the animal world, was locked up in a town called Goresby-St Clements.

The troops were called immediately – at first only mice and rats. The message was sent from house to house. Then the field mice were called on and the news flew across country from town

to town. John Dolittle was in danger! The message reached Goresby. Larger burrowing animals, like badgers, were needed to prise up the stones of the prison floor. Food was needed. Every larder for miles around was robbed of slices of cheese, pieces of bread, apples, banana – anything. The great man must have food. At night, when only a few policemen were on guard, the army set to work and drilled tunnel under the prison walls. And that was how Goresby jail had been wrecked.

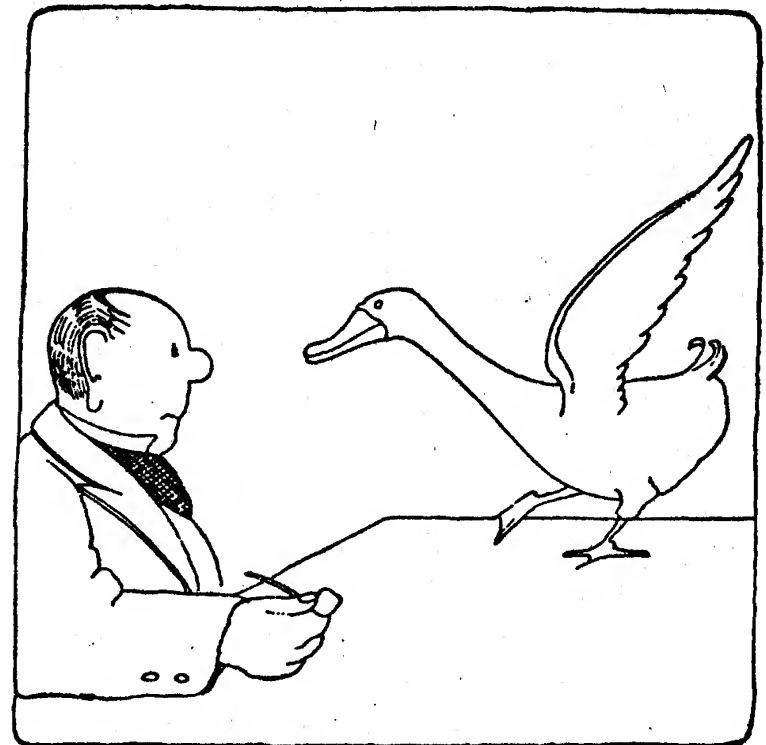
When Whitey had finished his story there was a short silence. Suddenly I heard something outside. I could see from the Doctor's face that he heard it too. It was a peculiar noise coming from the bottom of the garden. To any ordinary ears it was just a lot of squeaks – loud squeaks. But to us who knew animal languages it meant something more. It was a party – a very noisy party – of rats and mice, celebrating the Doctor's home-coming. We listened. Speeches were being made. There was a lot of applause. One speaker ended and another began. Cheers and more cheers. Now we could even make out the words in the distance: 'Hooray! Hooray!'

The Doctor's back home again! Hip, hip, hooray! Who brought him back? The Prison Rat! Three cheers for the Doctor! Three cheers for the Prison Rat! Hooray, hooray, hooray!

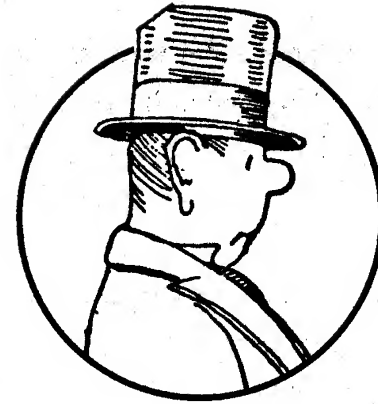
The voices trailed off and faded away. Dab-Dab turned again to scold Whitey.

'You little villain!' she began, 'I could—'

'Oh, never mind, never mind,' said the Doctor. 'Leave him alone, Dab-Dab. The harm



is done now. I'm sure Whitey and his friends meant well so let bygones be bygones.'



9. *A Grand Party*

At this moment the Doctor was called away to see a patient in the surgery. I went with him. It was a weasel with a sprained back – not an easy matter to put right at all. I helped the Doctor with the case.

After hours of working on it we got the small creature into a sort of jacket made of twigs, like a tube, so that he couldn't bend his spine in any direction. It looked as though it was very uncomfortable for the weasel. They are naturally squirmy, wriggly things. But this one soon found, when the Doctor had laid him down in one of his little box beds, that the pain in his back wasn't so bad as long as he did what

the Doctor told him to – which was to keep perfectly still. We moved him into the small-animal hospital in the attic.

As we started to go downstairs Chee-Chee met us with the news that a heron was waiting to see him with severe gout trouble in the leg joints.

‘There you are, Stubbins,’ said John Dolittle, ‘you see? What chance is there for me to get this book finished while I have to look after these patients? I can’t neglect them, can I? What am I to do?’

‘Look here, Doctor,’ I said. ‘I have an idea. While you were away many cases came to the house. I told them that you were not here and wouldn’t be back for some time. Well, some of them needed attention right away. They asked me to see to them. I was really scared at first, afraid I wouldn’t do the right thing. But you see, being your assistant for so long, I had learned a lot.’

At this point I noticed Polynesia hopping up the stairs to meet us.

‘Some of the cases, Doctor,’ I said, ‘were quite tricky. But you were not here and I had take them on. I actually set a wren’s broken wing. What do you think of that?’

‘Why, Stubbins!’ he cried, ‘that’s splendid! Setting a wing on a bird as small as that is about as delicate a job as I know of. Splendid, splendid! And it came out all right?’

‘It certainly did, Doctor,’ said Polynesia. ‘I was there and I know. Remember, I gave Tommy his first lessons in bird languages, the same as I did to you. I always knew he’d turn out to be a good animal doctor.’



'Now you see, Doctor,' I said, 'there's no reason why you should not turn over the surgery to me. If any particularly difficult job should come along I can always call you in. But you need not bother with the ordinary work of the patients. Go ahead and write your book in peace here, in your own home. Why not?'

'Er – yes, Stubbins,' he said slowly. 'After all, why not? An excellent idea! Anyhow, we can see how it works.'

And so the plan was actually tried out. Dab-Dab and Polynesia gave orders to everybody in the household that as soon as a patient appeared at the gate I should be sent for and not the Doctor. I was a bit scared at first, in case I made some serious mistakes with the more difficult cases; and while I was better off than when the Doctor had been away, I did not want to call upon him for help too often.

But on the whole things went very well. I made Chee-Chee and Polynesia my assistants. The monkey was a wonderful help with his small hands. For all such work as rolling narrow bandages (some of them no wider than a shoe-lace) his slender fingers were just the thing. He

was, too, a naturally kind soul and the animal patients liked him. I taught him how to count a pulse with the watch and take temperatures with the thermometer.

Polynesia I used mostly as a special interpreter when difficulties in animal languages cropped up. We often had new and rare animals coming to the surgery, like bats and voles and magpies. And without the old parrot's help it would have been very hard for me to talk to them.

As soon as I had the whole thing running smoothly I must admit I felt very proud – especially when the Doctor came and visited us and said he thought we were doing a wonderful job.

And of course all the members of the household were more than delighted. They saw now a chance of keeping the beloved Doctor under his own roof for a long time, since he was busy on his book.

One evening just as I was closing up the surgery they all came to me and asked me to do them a special favour. Naturally I asked them what it was before I made any promises.

'Well, Tommy, it's like this,' said Gub-Gub. 'While we are very pleased that the Doctor is

staying with us for a time, we don't see as much of him as we used to. He's always writing that book. We think he ought to give himself a holiday once in a while. And then again, we miss him a lot at our evening chats over the kitchen fire. You know what splendid stories and disgustings—' (Discussions, you booby, discussions!' snapped Jip in his ear.) 'Yes — er — discussions is what I mean,' Gub-Gub went on. 'And it isn't the same any more now.'

'Yes, I understand that,' I said.

'So we all thought,' said Gub-Gub, 'that it would be a good way to celebrate the Doctor's returning home to ask him to come to an after-supper party in the kitchen.'

'And you see, Tommy,' said Whitey, 'it will be specially nice now because we're well into autumn and we can have a roaring fire.'

'What do you say, Tommy?' said Gub-Gub.

'Well, Gub-Gub,' I said, 'I think it would do the Doctor good to get away from his work for one evening. I'll go and talk with him and see what he says.'

As a matter of fact, it was not easy for me to persuade the Doctor. I found him in his study,

writing busily as usual. **Sheets of paper** with notes on them lay **all over the floor**; more pieces of paper were pinned **on the walls** around his desk; plates of sandwiches (**which** devoted Dab-Dab brought him **three times a day**) were scattered round the room, **many** of them untouched. I explained to **him** what the animals had asked me.

'Well, Stubbins,' he said. 'I would most willingly come down to the kitchen after supper — I used to regularly at one time, you know. But — er — well — just now it's different. I'm behind with the book. Thought I would have been much further along with it by this time.'

'But listen, Doctor,' I said. 'It will do you good to leave your desk for one evening. The animals have set their hearts on it. They want to celebrate you coming home — to them.'

He smiled. Then he laughed. Then he threw his pencil down on the desk.

'All right, Stubbins,' he said. 'It probably will do me no harm to get away for a while.'

He rose from his chair and we left the study.

It was indeed a very successful evening. Everybody was there: Jip, Too-Too, Polynesia,

Chee-Chee, Gub-Gub, Whitey, Dab-Dab and Cheapside. Matthew Mugg had dropped in again, so we had him too.

Piles and piles of wood had been gathered in the kitchen and stacked near the hearth. The air was cold and brisk, and a splendid fire was roaring in the chimney. Dab-Dab had prepared plates of sandwiches, hard-boiled eggs, toasted cheese on biscuits, radishes and glasses of milk. Gub-Gub had brought for himself a large heap of rosy autumn apples. (He said he always listened best on apples.) The big kitchen table looked like a grand picnic.

When the Doctor came in he was greeted by a noisy chorus of cheers.

'Ah!' Whitey whispered to me as he climbed to his place on the mantelpiece. 'This, Tommy, is really like old times. Hand me up one of those cheese-biscuits, will you?'

Well, stories were told by everybody, new stories, old stories, true stories and stories that might have been true. Jip told one; Too-Too told one; Chee-Chee told one; the Doctor told four, and I told two. Whitey told some jokes and Cheapside gave us the up-to-date news



from London. Gub-Gub recited a romantic poem he had written called, 'Meet Me on the Garbage Heap When the Moon is Hanging Low', and Polynesia sang us sea-songs in five different languages. I have never heard so much laughing and chattering in all my life. The kitchen floor was covered with the shells of hard-boiled eggs, radish tops and sandwich crumbs. It was a grand party.

I was beginning to think it would never break up, when at last, somewhere about two o'clock in the morning, Matthew said he ought to be getting back home. This gave Dab-Dab, who wanted to get the kitchen cleaned up before breakfast-time, a chance to shoo the family off to bed. The Doctor, Matthew and I went into the study.

'How are you getting on with the book, Doctor?' asked the Cats'-meat-man.

'Well, Matthew,' said John Dolittle, 'not as fast as I would like. But I'll be all right now that Stubbins is taking over the patients for me. You heard about that? Isn't it good news? What would I have done without him?'

'Listen, Doctor,' I said. 'You won't sit up too late, will you? You'll have plenty of time to work in the morning now, you know. I'm just going to see Matthew down to the gate. Now please don't work too late.'

Matthew and I stepped out into the garden. On our way round the house to the front we had to pass the study window. We both stopped and gazed in for a moment. John Dolittle was already writing away furiously. The little reading



lamp with its green glass shade threw a soft light on his serious, kindly face.

'There he is,' whispered Matthew, 'working away. Ain't it like him? Trying to set the world to rights? Well, it takes all kinds . . . You know, Tommy, me, I never seemed to have time to bother about setting the world to rights. The world was always trying to set me to rights – if you know what I mean . . . Do you think he'll ever get his book finished, Tommy?'

'Yes, Matthew,' I whispered back, 'I believe

he will. He has always achieved anything he's set his heart on, you know.'

'Humph!' muttered the Cats'-meat-man.

'Yes, I wouldn't wonder but you're right, Tommy.'

And silently we walked away through the darkness towards the gate.





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